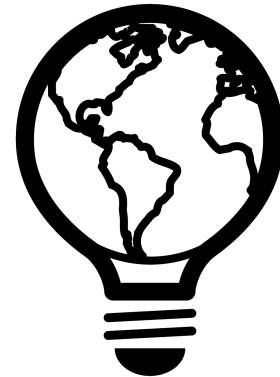




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Startup Camp Youth Amman 2019

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AMMAN, JOR - On Thursday, March 21, Startup Camp Youth Amman (SCYA) took place at the Queen Rania Center for Entrepreneurship in Amman, Jordan. The three day program offered high school, college and university aged students in Amman and from across the country the opportunity to innovate their ideas into reality, and network with area business, entrepreneurship and education professionals. The inaugural youth-led and oriented event in Jordan, SCYA was a collaboration between Global Youth Entrepreneurs, which sent four members to Amman; Princess Sumaya University for Technology, which generously provided the venue; Queen Rania Center for Entrepreneurship, which acted as the program host, and the DART student entrepreneurship society, which worked closely with GYE members on outreach and facilitation. In addition, SCYA received gracious financial sponsorship from the Amman branch of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, and in-kind sponsorship from Amman area startups Bilforon, a current tech based delivery service, and ABUDARI Graphic Design Services, creator of the program logo.

Startup Camp Youth Amman was borne out of the prevailing notion that young people must be at the center of innovation and business development, and that young people thus deserve the practical skills and experience to achieve barometers of excellence in those fields. In Jordan, there has been an increasing understanding of entrepreneurship as a valued field, and since the explosion of

entrepreneurship only seven years ago, the Hashemite Kingdom has now become the regional hub for the startup scene in the Middle East. SCYA was oriented to account for that boom in thought and ideation, but also structured to find ways to tackle the remaining stagnation of progress, and help young people address issues head on.

Throughout its three days of work, SCYA geared students in the direction of social problems. Instead of tasking students with purely economic questions, mentors and facilitators invited students to first simply consider which societal problems or inefficiencies cause the most trouble and headache in their daily lives. With these notions in mind, the program then encouraged attendees to pitch ideas that would both solve a particular social issue, and carry an intrinsic economic funding source. A custom of “social entrepreneurship,” these ideas clearly demonstrated their own need, and illustrated a much stronger case for both private and publicly sourced funding. At the end of the weekend, teams came away with prizes, feedback from experienced business and education leaders, and pairings with mentors for future consultation. While merely a start in what amounts to a lifelong practice, SCYA produced a number of viable business ideas that are being introduced to the real marketplace in Amman, and all participants were given the skills to replicate this process in the future, with some students even vowing to hold their own events for their peers in the near future.

Structure of Work:

The schedule of Startup Camp Youth Amman mixed student exploration and challenge with expert instruction and guidance. All three days allowed students to push their creativity and pragmatism, while discovering and noting translatable work skills relevant to the rest of their respective lives. On Thursday, students were introduced to the overarching model of entrepreneurship that would animate the event, before hearing a panel of distinguished entrepreneurs and educators speak about their professional journeys and engaging these guests with a wealth of questions. The students were then taken through a number of icebreaker and team building exercises to get to know their peers on a closer and more collaborative level. Later that evening, students were led through a series of pitch exercises, beginning with simple popcorn style discussions about local issues, and then moving towards active engagement of speaking and persuasion skills.

The next morning was an early start, and began with students taking the stage and pitching their company or product ideas to the entire SCYA cohort. Participants voted for their favorite ideas, with companies coalescing around the top four of these ideas. This morning alone bore witness to a first in our program’s history: every single student pitched an idea, and this was indicative of the passion and care constant throughout the weekend. After teams formed, each received a classroom to operate as new company headquarters, as well as templates and suggestions for how to begin work. After the initial stages of planning, each team was given access to mentorship from local business and education leaders, and these volunteers were also available to teams up until the final pitches. The rest of the second day consisted of work time, and teams focused on creating a minimum viable product, essentially the simplest form of a website, app, or module that could be presented on Friday night for feedback. During the day, they validated this in-progress model with potential customers, both virtually and in the field, developing their ideas according to the feedback received and following the principles of “pivoting.” Some mentors with more distinct areas of focus also provided

comprehensive and well-received workshops on topics such as customer validation, branding, prototyping, marketing and the business model canvas.

Saturday was the final day of SCYA and gave participants the opportunity to showcase their work. After more work time and mentorship in the morning, final pitches began at six in the evening. Each team was given up to ten minutes to present their company idea, and judges were allotted ten minutes to ask questions of each team. After pitches, and while judge deliberation occurred, local entrepreneurship groups took part in a tabling session in another room at the school, where they were able to share future program opportunities with participants and those who came to support them that night, therefore augmenting the reach of SCYA.

Winning Teams and Prizes:

The judges named Buset.com as the first place team, a company tackling unreliable and in some cases nonexistent public transportation, a bane of existence for many Ammanis, by designing an app that will optimize bus routes and schedules based on current foot traffic. Second place was given to Team Shiny, a company designing an efficient automatic watering system for urban household gardening. Finally, Team Sakura.jo, an online platform of education games that teach through interactive and engaging game design, won Best Presentation. All three teams earned an invitation to spend a day at Bilforon and consult with innovators there. Additionally, participants received a 10% discount on all *Dish of the Day* meals from Bilforon, along with a copy of a comic book on startup life by Bilforon CEO and SCYA judge, Mohammad Albattikhi, who personally gifted the books.

SCYA Impact and Sustainability:

For SCYA 2019 to be a truly beneficial influence on the local community it must inaugurate a tradition of youth-led entrepreneurship initiatives in Jordan, and this outcome looks imminent given the course of the weekend. The young people who took part, many already with impressive technical skills, were emboldened by the leadership the program prompted them to display, expressing commitment to help their compatriots discover and harness their own natural entrepreneurial capabilities. Specifically, teenage participants Sham and Jana Al Bdour, already distinguished as founders of Sakura.jo, will represent the Global Youth Entrepreneurs in Jordan and lead the organizational effort for SCYA 2.0, planned for late summer or fall of 2019 and expected to welcome students from across the country. One final sphere of success is that, through the mentorship program and speaker and judge panels, SCYA brought together individuals and organizations dedicated to expanding access to resources for entrepreneurship and self-advancement among Jordanian youth. Global Youth Entrepreneurs will also host future exchange programs between secondary students in Jordan and America.

Photos and Video:

A selection of photos that highlight the process and success of SCYA can be found on our website: <https://www.globalyouthentrepreneurs.net/scya>. A more expansive gallery from all three days can also be found here: <https://bit.ly/2WAWSMN>

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